

# Contrary to Stereotypes, a Nursing Home Resident Radiates Dignity and Joy

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**IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO FIND** images of healthy aging. Throughout most of the 20th century, most images of elders have reflected and reinforced a stereotype of advanced age as a time of decline, dependency, and disengagement from life.<sup>1</sup> These stereotypes are commonly reinforced by the medical model of care, which emphasizes the hazards, risks, and disabilities associated with aging. This medical model largely determines the organization of nursing homes and influences the health policies aimed at elders. Recently, however, recognition of the deficiencies of the medical model has led to the beginnings of a revolution in long-term care aimed at enhancing the quality of life. The goal of a new culture of healthy aging is to seek life-affirming surroundings to honor and respect elders and those working closely with them.<sup>2</sup>

Visual sociologist Cathy Stein Greenblat spent 6 weeks photographing elders at Silverado Senior Living, a residential care facility in Escondido, Calif, that specializes in dementia care and embraces the social model of long-term care. Greenblat explains that the special moment shown here was not at all unusual or infrequent at Silverado. Her moving book, *Alive with Alzheimer's*, documents how music, dance, mental stimulation, and the supportive relationships among residents, staff, families, children, and pets allow residents to live with much more



Source. Photograph by Cathy Stein Greenblat. Reprinted with permission.

meaning and vibrancy than many people think is possible for those with dementia.<sup>3</sup>

The resident shown here, Hanna, was in hospice care at Silverado when this photo was taken, and she died 2 months later. Too ill to join a group session with Heather, the music therapist, she still liked to sing her favorite song, "Sidewalks of New York," and enjoyed an unscheduled individual session with the musical therapist in the hallway. The young girl who is holding hands and locking eyes with Hanna is the daughter of one of the paid caregivers at Silverado.

Not everyone can afford such excellent and supportive care. More than 7 out of 10 people

with Alzheimer's disease continue living at home, where family and friends provide most of the care.<sup>4</sup> Sadly, low-income paid caregivers in nursing homes are usually unable to afford for their own families the kind of care they provide for the more privileged people they serve. ■

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